

Nutritional Assessment

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KEYWORDS

• Canine • Feline • Obesity • Nutritional assessment • Diet history

KEY POINTS

- Nutritional assessment is an iterative process that includes animal-specific factors, diet-specific factors, feeding management, and environmental factors.
- The nutritional assessment is an essential component of every patient visit during each veterinary consultation.
- The nutritional assessment includes a medical history, thorough diet history, and complete physical examination with appropriate diagnostic testing.
- A comprehensive nutritional assessment lays the foundation for developing a successful treatment plan for the overweight or obese patient.

INTRODUCTION

Nutritional assessment is an iterative process that encompasses evaluation of the animal, the food being offered and consumed, the animal's environment, and the feeding management strategy being used by the caregiver. These factors are interrelated and are depicted by the American College of Veterinary Nutrition "Circle of Nutrition" (Fig. 1). The American Hospital Association and the World Small Animal Veterinary Association recommend nutritional assessment and dietary recommendations every time a pet presents for veterinary consultation.^{1,2} Each factor influences the patient's nutritional status and because each factor can change over time, reassessment of each variable and possible modification of the nutrition plan is warranted. When presented with an overweight or obese pet, the nutrition assessment is an essential starting point. Careful consideration of animal-specific, diet-specific, feeding management, and environmental factors allows the clinician to develop a specific nutrition plan for that patient that is acceptable and achievable to the owner and the pet.

PATIENT ASSESSMENT

Relevant animal-specific factors are obtained during patient assessment. Signalment is important because certain endogenous patient variables can increase the risk of an

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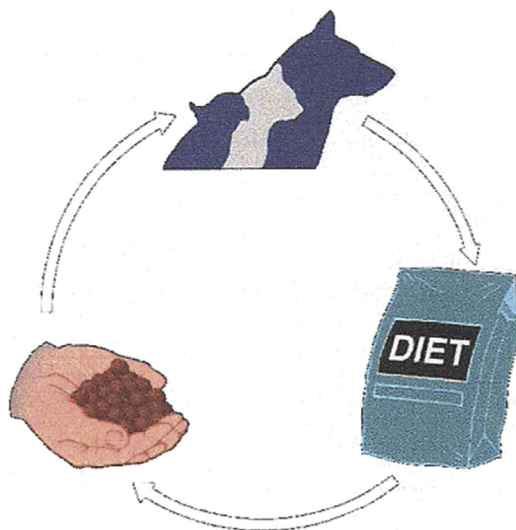


Fig. 1. The animal, diet, and feeding management are each evaluated during a nutritional assessment. These factors are interrelated. (Courtesy of the American College of Veterinary Nutrition, Santa Clarita, CA; with permission.)

animal becoming obese. Certain breeds of dogs (eg, Labrador Retriever, Cocker Spaniel, Dachshund, Shetland Sheepdog, Golden Retriever)³ and cats (eg, Domestic Shorthair, Manx)⁴ may be predisposed to becoming overweight or obese, although specific genetic factors leading to obesity are complex and are not currently completely understood. Middle-aged dogs and cats are at an increased risk for being overweight.^{3,4} Neutering can alter energy balance and increase food intake resulting in weight gain.^{5–14} Although the patient's signalment cannot be changed, recognition of endogenous risk factors that may predispose to obesity should be discussed at an early stage with the pet owner so that appropriate modifications to the nutrition plan, such as decreasing energy intake at the time of neutering, can be instituted.

Medical History

A complete medical history is an important component of the nutritional assessment. The patient may be suffering from one of several comorbidities associated with obesity that may impact diet selection (eg, lower carbohydrate intake for a diabetic cat) or impact the overall weight loss plan (eg, concurrent physical therapy for an arthritic dog). Certain endocrinopathies, such as hypothyroidism or hyperadrenocorticism, can contribute to weight gain. Some medications can contribute to weight gain either by causing polyphagia (eg, phenobarbital) or by altering protein, carbohydrate, and lipid metabolism resulting in weight gain and increased adiposity (eg, glucocorticoids). An essential component of the comprehensive history is a thorough dietary history, discussed in more detail in a later section.

Physical Examination

A comprehensive physical examination is an integral component of the nutritional assessment. Comorbidities that limit exercise tolerance or necessitate specific

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